

JOSEF WEBER

THE GREAT UTOPIA
(1950)



**PRINCIPLES, PROPOSITIONS &
DISCUSSIONS
FOR LAND & FREEDOM**

AN INTRODUCTORY WORD TO THE 'ANARCHIVE'

"Anarchy is Order!"

*'I must Create a System or be enslav'd by
another Man's.
I will not Reason & Compare: my business
is to Create'
(William Blake)*

During the 19th century, anarchism has developed as a result of a social current which aims for freedom and happiness. A number of factors since World War I have made this movement, and its ideas, disappear little by little under the dust of history.

After the classical anarchism – of which the Spanish Revolution was one of the last representatives—a 'new' kind of resistance was founded in the sixties which claimed to be based (at least partly) on this anarchism. However this resistance is often limited to a few (and even then partly misunderstood) slogans such as 'Anarchy is order', 'Property is theft',...

Information about anarchism is often hard to come by, monopolised and intellectual; and therefore visibly disappearing. The 'anarchive' or 'anarchist archive' Anarchy is Order (in short **A.O**) is an attempt to make the '**principles, propositions and discussions**' of this tradition available again for anyone it concerns. We believe that these texts are part of our own heritage. They don't belong to publishers, institutes or specialists.

These texts thus have to be available for all anarchists and other people interested. That is one of the conditions to give anarchism a new impulse, to let the 'new anarchism' outgrow the slogans. This is what makes this project relevant for us: we must find our roots to be able to renew ourselves. We have to learn from the mistakes of our socialist past. History has shown that a large number of the anarchist ideas remain

standing, even during the most recent social-economic developments.

‘Anarchy Is Order’ does not make profits, everything is spread at the price of printing- and papercosts. This of course creates some limitations for these archives.

Everyone is invited to spread along the information we give . This can be done by copying our leaflets, printing texts from the CD (collecting all available texts at a given moment) that is available or copying it, e-mailing the texts to friends and new ones to us,... Become your own anarchivists!!!

(Be aware though of copyright restrictions. We also want to make sure that the anarchist or non-commercial printers, publishers and authors are not being harmed. Our priority on the other hand remains to spread the ideas, not the ownership of them.)

The anarchivists offers these texts hoping that values like **freedom, solidarity and direct action** get a new meaning and will be lived again; so that the struggle continues against the

*“...demons of flesh and blood, that sway scepters down here;
and the dirty microbes that send us dark diseases and wish to
squash us like horseflies;
and the will-‘o-the-wisp of the saddest ignorance.”*

(L-P. Boon)

The rest depends as much on you as it depends on us. Don’t mourn, Organise!

Comments, questions, criticism, cooperation can be sent to A.O@advalvas.be.

A complete list and updates are available on this address, new texts are always

welcome!!

JOSEF WEBER AND “CONTEMPORARY ISSUES”

by **KEN KNABB**

Contemporary Issues: A Magazine for a Democracy of Content was published in London and New York from 1948-1970. A sister journal, *Dinge der Zeit* (Cologne), published many of the same articles in German. The most influential contributor was Josef Weber, who wrote under the pseudonyms Ernst Zander, William Lunen and Erik Erikson and who died in 1959.

The *CI* participants had arrived at some of the same basic positions as *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and other postwar ultraleftist groups — recognition that the Stalinist regimes were state-capitalist, rejection of the Leninist vanguard-party form of organization, etc. They differed from such groups in also rejecting the notion of class struggle, feeling that it was now a question of a “majority revolution” in which everyone would cease right from the start to participate *as* workers or whatever their previous status may have been. By “a democracy of content” they meant a genuine, all-embracing, totally participatory democracy (implying the supersession of the state and the commodity system) as opposed to the merely formal representative democracy of present societies.

In addition to disseminating information on all sorts of contemporary issues, from science and education to economic crises and anticolonial movements, *CI* participants took part in campaigns against atom bomb tests, against West German remilitarization and against South African apartheid. They were also among the first to raise ecological and environmental issues (Murray

Bookchin's first studies on urban overdevelopment and the dangers of pesticides and food additives appeared as *CI* articles in the 1950s). In 1956 they conducted a vigorous campaign urging armed support for the Hungarian revolutionaries. One of their main theses was that Stalinism and Western capitalism, despite their apparent opposition, operated as a mutually reinforcing "business partnership." Stalinism (both by policing the regions it controlled and by representing a pseudoalternative that confused and perverted oppositional efforts elsewhere) helped the Western powers maintain their rule, while the latter, despite their show of denouncing "Communist tyranny," made sure to do nothing to practically aid its overthrow (refusing, for example, to send the antitank weapons desperately needed by the Hungarian insurgents) and, in order to maintain the specter of a credible enemy threat, covered up the fact that Russia and its satellites were actually insanely mismanaged and impoverished — a diagnosis that has recently been glaringly confirmed.

The *CI* participants strove to organize their radical activities in such a way that they would already embody the essential features of the society they wanted to create; or at least resist as long as possible the constant tendency for any oppositional movement under capitalism to degenerate into a fetish, an end in itself, a bureaucracy concerned with perpetuating itself and protecting its own separate interests. One consequence of this perspective was that they were among the first people to practice systematic anticopyright. They saw their journal not as the expression of a specific group, but as a forum for open-ended public debate. While many publications make a show of inviting feedback, it was the very essence of *CI*'s strategy. They envisioned

the spread of radical-democratic movements as more and more people entered into discussions that were conducted with the strictest openness, honesty and rigor, feeling that such dialogue was already in itself a contradiction to the ignorance and isolation fostered by the system and a prefiguration of new social relations.

As far as I know there was never any contact between *CI* and the situationists, nor even any mutual awareness until the late sixties. SI members met and then broke with Bookchin in 1967, but Bookchin had by that time left *CI* and had already begun developing into an anarchist ideologue. The chapter on revolutionary organization in Robert Chasse's *The Power of Negative Thinking* (1968) incorporated a number of *CI* ideas, and in a "Reply to Murray Bookchin" later that year Chasse and Bruce Elwell briefly criticized *CI*'s notion of majority revolution. In its next-to-last issue (#53, December 1969) *CI* approvingly reprinted the SI's *On the Poverty of Student Life*, stating that while they disagreed with the SI's continued use of certain traditional terms such as "proletariat" and "workers councils," they believed that the situationist and *CI* perspectives were basically much the same.

As indeed they were. It may therefore be interesting to consider some of their differences.

1) *CI* examined issues in great detail, documenting their statements and patiently responding to questions, objections and misconceptions. The SI was far more concise, typically mentioning in passing some point *CI* might have taken a whole article to deal with. Some of this difference can of course be attributed to the difference in periods: the SI had less need to go into

detail about the horrors of colonialism or the dangers of nuclear radiation because such information was already fairly well known (in part because of earlier publications such as *CI*). But it's also a matter of different strategies. The *CI* method is most appropriate when it's necessary to prove one's case and refute official apologists. The situationists, seeing that such debates often functioned as diversionary spectacles, felt it was more urgent to cut through the glut of information and zero in on a few essential points. They knew that once they had done this other people would be inspired to pursue their own radical ventures in their own areas of competence or concern (including carrying out more thorough investigations where necessary).

2) *CI* was more "tolerant." While the SI rejected many forms of dialogue as a waste of time and often broke with people on rather subtle grounds, *CI* participants were generally willing to patiently discuss issues with any person of good faith. It should be noted, however, that *CI* did not avoid some heated breaks and polemics, and that Weber in particular was every bit as caustic as the situationists when it came to denouncing the duplicity of people in positions of power or influence. This is not the place to go into this complex issue — which I have discussed elsewhere and which has been dealt with in detail in several SI articles — except to say that while I temperamentally incline to the more mellow *CI* approach and feel it may be appropriate in many situations, I think it has to be recognized that the SI's "ruthlessness" had a more powerful impact in challenging people to stand on their own feet.

3) Culturally, *CI* was more traditional than the SI. Seeing dadaism, surrealism and other modern avant-garde

tendencies as little more than delirious symptoms of capitalist decomposition, Weber harkened back to the best values of classic humanistic culture, enthusing over Rabelais and Sterne and Diderot, analyzing Wagner's Ring cycle as symbolic of the rise and fall of bourgeois society, satirizing his *bête noire* Thomas Mann in Goethe-style verse, embellishing his diatribes with lengthy quotes from Heine and William Cobbett. The situationists were, of course, also familiar with the best cultural achievements of the past, but they used them much more sparingly, detouring only the occasional pertinent insight and considering the source more or less irrelevant. I think this difference is largely a matter of taste. I happen to enjoy Weber's 50-page article on Diderot's *Jacques the Fatalist*, but most people would probably prefer the situationists' conciseness.

4) There's no question that the SI was far more influential. Not only have few people today ever heard of *CI*, I don't believe it was very well known even at the time. Despite some promising beginnings, it never succeeded in engendering any significant "movement for a democracy of content" (though it may have contributed indirectly to the notion of "participatory democracy" that emerged in the early sixties). On the other hand, such modest influence as it did have seems to have been almost totally exemplary.

In any case, I believe that this 22-year experiment provides a rare combination of rigor and open-mindedness that we can still learn from. I still find the old *CI* articles both refreshing and informative, which is more than I can say for most other radical publications, old or new. And Weber is one of the most brilliant and

provocative radical theorists I have ever read, though I realize that his idiosyncrasies are not to everyone's taste.

The volumes of *Contemporary Issues* are unfortunately not available anywhere except in a few major libraries, and it is unlikely that any of the material will be reprinted in the near future. For now I have put online Weber's [The Great Utopia](#) (1950), which served as the group's initial basis for discussion. If enough interest is expressed, I may later upload some more.

[*Note added July 2002:* See <http://www.oxygensmith.com/~arc/pre-post-scarcityanarchism/> for some more detailed information on the history of the *CI* group.]

THE GREAT UTOPIA

OUTLINES FOR A PLAN OF ORGANIZATION AND ACTIVITY
OF A DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT

JOSEF WEBER

1950

(Submitted in agreement with the editors and friends of
Dinge der Zeit and *Contemporary Issues*)

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From *Contemporary Issues: A Magazine for a
Democracy of Content* #5 (London, 1950). I have
omitted the numerous and often very lengthy footnotes,
which provide documentary elaboration on the points in
the text but are not necessary to the main argument.

For a brief appreciation of the *CI* group see [Josef Weber
and “Contemporary Issues”](#). No copyright.

1

For thousands of years tormented humanity has been laboring at the solution of the disconsolate and trivial tasks of how to eat, dwell and live in security; for thousands of years, it has yearned for a paradise from which it feels itself expelled and to which it wishes to return. The theme which myths and fairy tales sing of, the force which impels masses into movement, the desideratum of founders of religions, what philosophers have brooded over, the object of the enquiries of scientists, the visionings of poets, the achievements or aspirations of statesmen and revolutionaries — all revolve round these two poles and are nourished, at root, only by the terrible necessity for securing the perpetuation of life in good or evil. But all endeavor had to remain fantasy and Utopia, the problem of humanity could, in the final analysis, find merely a temporary regulation “in evil” as long as it was not possible to produce sufficient goods for the satisfaction of even the most urgent needs of everybody. This decisive difficulty was only removed by the so-called *Industrial Revolution*, which, towards the middle of the last century, also encompassed Germany and America and constituted the basis for the “Communist Manifesto,” which appeared in 1848, that is, for scientific socialism in general.

2

To have elaborated the simple fact that the dream of humanity was not realizable without definite material

prerequisites (while at the same time proving that these prerequisites were maturing) remains an historical act of sweeping significance — the great merit of the much-maligned Marx and Engels. And as long as the material prerequisites for a higher social organization have not been destroyed, there is nothing *in principle* to obstruct the solution of the social question with which all controversies are concerned.

In history, it is exclusively a matter of what has actually happened, not of what might have occurred under different circumstances and conditions. It is purely and simply a matter of historical fact that all progress has been achieved at the expense of the great majority, that is, it has been accompanied by the rise and increase of the social question. The social question is, in truth, but the form in which the struggle to assure the continuance of human life is fought. Real Marxism (the original in contradistinction to that caricature which demagogic falsifiers incessantly suck out of their thumbs and abysmal ignorance assiduously diffuses) has always emphasized therefore, in every advance of civilization, the social and human retrogression, implicit in the birth of the social question.

3

Pursuing the contrast between civilizatory progress and social retrogression to its ultimate consequences, Marxism posed the alternative — either “Socialism or Barbarism.” If we fail to transform the capitalist mode of production into a socialist mode, barbarism is no longer an abstract threat but assumes the sharply delineated

outlines for the doom of all modern society. World wars, like the last two and the anticipated third, are, according to Marxism, integral constituents of the capitalist system and as unavoidable as the increasingly closer interlacement of State power with control over the means of production, accompanied by the revival of outright slavery and the enormous growth of parasitic strata. War and civil war become the mode of existence of bourgeois society; interventions by foreign powers are on the order of the day; nations and national minorities are annihilated, expelled, dismembered and put under control; a continually increasing percentage of the social product is devoted to the production of means of destruction and to services and institutions connected with destruction, while official begging for every sort of “palliative” and diversionary purpose increases. Of particular importance is the one-sided civil war conducted against the population in the Russian sphere of power which will extend over the whole world if the present foundations are maintained, irrespective of whether fascism or western “democracy” emerges as victor from the struggle for world domination.

4

Russia has not the slightest connection with Socialism or “Communism” whether in the national or international, ideological or material sense. The nationalization of the means of production which (for example, also in England) is misrepresented as “Socialism” does not in the least alter the character of the economy as a private profit economy (it remains irrelevant whether it is managed in the interests of the old owners or of a new

bureaucracy). It does not overcome a single one of the devastating consequences of the capitalist system but rather drives these vehemently towards that point where unrestrained Russian barbarism makes manifest the final outcome of capitalist development. For this reason serious Marxists have denounced mere nationalization as the crippled offspring of “free” competition and as a lever of economic and political reaction. In addition, as against Stalinists, reformists and supporters of “private initiative,” they have insisted unyieldingly and without illusion that each “last” war would achieve neither freedom nor economic advance but would only prepare the field for the fight for world supremacy. The more assiduously the ideologists have contested this in the past and nurtured extravagant hopes, the more they are cultivating today the melancholy “recognition” that “two great powers have remained” who, with their respective satellites, will soon clash with each other. But to acknowledge Marxism, for which the new conflict was only one among many obvious matters, as the superior method of viewing the world — that, of course, occurs to scarcely anyone.

5

The development of capitalist society was, in general, fully anticipated by Marxism in all important respects and — with a painful certainty — especially in its negative or destructive aspect. But the moment that this negative side predominates, and thereby brings about the alternative effect (and this would happen when the proletariat for whatever reason was unable to achieve or maintain the social revolution), it signals that

Marxism is broken up insofar as it represents a political system and bases itself upon the working class as the fulcrum for development and as the force for the accomplishment of the positive solution.

There is no longer any possibility of doubt in this direction: the classical workers' movement has perished through the betrayals of the Second and Third International, and will never arise again. As a politically organized class — symbolized by a party, capable of action, which intervenes in the struggles of the masses and leads them purposefully with its *own* tasks and aims — the modern proletariat has already suffered the threatened “penalty of destruction” or (as in America) has never achieved political organization. The conception that the organized workers would overcome the capitalist system and would, in emancipating themselves, emancipate the whole of society, is at least historically obsolete. The political dissolution of the workers' movement is accompanied by the destruction of its economic foundations, that is, by the extension of slave labor with little or no mechanical equipment and which first became a mass phenomenon in Russia. Henceforth the solution of the task falls directly on the overwhelming majority of mankind whose interests increasingly coalesce and can be reduced to a common denominator socially as well as nationally and internationally. The development is, via a detour, again approaching the old Marxist ideal of a simultaneous turnabout in all or at least many countries.

Having arrived at the utmost entanglement, the character of the social question is transformed into its opposite: The problem becomes quite simple again and requires for its solution in principle no other method than that by which Alexander unraveled the Gordian knot. With it, the century-old controversy over Marxism has also become historically redundant. For a long time already it has ceased to be a question of determining the future course of historical development but has been one of utilizing sensibly an achieved result. Since the material bases for the overcoming of the crisis of humanity demonstrably exist, the task is reduced to a mere measure of administration which can be accomplished with existing forces and means and can be enforced by democratic majority decision. The position with regard to theoretical dispute is essentially the same as that of a practitioner who is engaged in saving mother and child by a Caesarian operation and no longer discusses whether historical materialism or Christianity is the correct doctrine. A new consciousness of the practicability of the old "Utopias of reason" is necessary and, at the height of confusion, will drive its way through. Antiquity took centuries to die — bourgeois society came to birth only after long struggles and with the help of bloody revolutions. The attempt to perpetuate bourgeois conditions is thus a delusion. The alternative still is either Socialism (an economy for the satisfaction of human needs) or Barbarism. The task therefore is to stimulate consciousness into making an inventory of resources and into showing how and by what means the proposed aim is to be achieved.

One must not expect miracles, of course. Less than ever is this a time for illusions. The curse of blindness burdens bourgeois society and makes the perspective of self-annihilation appear “more realistic” than the attempt at a rational change of existing conditions. The destruction of productive capacity, of material and human beings, repeated on an ever-increasing scale, is crowned by the possibility of an atomic and bacteriological war — cold-bloodedly considered and recommended as the best solution for the contemporary dilemma. But in wars lies not the only danger threatening the existence of humanity. The higher the productive forces are developed and, under the domination of capital, increasingly put to the service of aims of destruction, the more rapidly are the natural sources of wealth exhausted. As long as the profit motive determines economy, the celebrated control of nature on the basis of science remains problematical in the highest degree and produces innumerable “unforeseen” effects. Reckless exhaustion of agricultural soil; despoliation of forests, altering watersheds, the courses of rivers, the water table and both the quantity and effect of precipitations; extermination of fauna on the one hand and overgrazing of pasture land by domestic herds on the other — all this denudes the land of its natural protection against being washed and blown away by floods and winds (so-called erosion or “land cancer”), the extent of which has of late evoked loud Cassandra cries on the part of “experts.”

A further malignant effect of bad agricultural methods used for profit extraction is the predominant or exclusive use of artificial fertilizer which reduces the nutritional value of the foodstuffs produced (including fodder and the slaughter stock fed on it which is in addition often

bred at an artificially rapid tempo). To this must be added the contamination, dangerous to life, of rivers and coasts through the excessive discharge of industrial refuse (including many chemicals), urban dirt and human excrement urgently needed on the land. It must be regarded as certain that all these factors, but especially the one-sided use of chemical fertilizers, are responsible for the appalling increase of heart maladies (disturbances of the circulation), of cancer and other modern plagues which must be considered in the strictest sense of the word as *production diseases*. Chemistry cannot replace Nature and the natural processes. In this way does violation of the law already expressed by Justus von Liebig as a warning — Man must return to Nature what he takes from her — avenge itself.

8

Capitalist development proceeds with extreme unevenness. It unceasingly revolutionizes all relationships and produces colossal disproportions between town and country, between the various branches of production and the different countries and continents. As a result of this uneven development, the United States of America, which contributes only 7% of all working people in the world, today participates to the extent of about 50% in world industrial and over 20% in world agricultural production. On the basis of commodity production a disproportion of such magnitude has immeasurable weight and impresses its stamp on the rest of the development.

It is a great irony of history that Europe which once colonized the world is now herself being depressed to colonial status by a former colony and, by means of “peaceful” trade conferences, Marshall Plans, etc., is being put on rations which are to confirm and consolidate the supremacy of the United States. In this process America’s aspirations are not the result of any fantastic “evil will” but of the innermost driving forces of the capitalist mode of production which draw Good and Evil into their orbit and subject every impulse to their blind fury. We must learn to face the cruel facts and to understand that German fascism, too, only exposed the deepest essence of capitalism and its ultimate consequences, when it transformed the ever extending “I or You” of free competition into the monopolist slogan of “We or You.” This slogan corresponded to capitalist reality after the end of the first world war. It formulated the compulsory situation created by the development which has come to light in its full dimensions as a *capitalist-historical* inevitability through the political events of recent years. With ineluctable lawfulness it was neither Russia nor England but the United States which became both the author and the guarantor of “unconditional surrender,” the Morgenthau Plan, the Potsdam Agreement, etc. The real historical adversary of Germany and England was this very American imperialism which recognized the “Command of the hour” and, in the person of Roosevelt, understood how to maneuver the people into the war against their will. By him also the question of “We or You” was quite clearly foreseen and included, apart from Germany and England, also Japan, while Russia by force of circumstances could become junior partner to a far greater degree than any other “ally.”

With America's victory a power has overwhelmed the world, the mass production of mediocre and inferior quality, which far surpasses all the other powers in importance and which has both negative and positive effects.

By maintaining commodity economy, the negative side advances into the foreground. For not only is it the basis of the existing world situation but also of the further deterioration of the general situation in the economic, social, political, intellectual and moral relations.

The same power, however, can become the point of departure for a contrary development. Both theoretically and practically, the possibility exists in principle for still further extension of mass production and for the alleviation of mankind's most urgent needs within the shortest space of time. On the existing basis, with the elimination of waste and superfluous industries (besides those of armaments, especially such as cause the extinction of certain plant and animal species or the exhaustion of raw materials which could be better utilized) it would at the same time be possible for quality production to rise uninterruptedly, to establish a rational relationship between mass production (which will always be necessary for certain types of human needs) and quality production, and to make the boundaries between the two "fluid" through the improvement of mass production. In this alone exists the basis for the "simplification" of the social question, the practical solution of which is now the most important issue. In

principle or within range of the human will nothing else is necessary than the decision to give “free play” to the production of really useful goods in every country on earth and to distribute these (to the extent that they are exchangeable) in accordance with the amount of labor time rendered.

Inexhaustible as human labor power (“the producer of all values”) are also the possibilities of social and individual development once the fetters of commodity production fall away, out of necessity, and man is able to assert himself freely and to identify himself with the products of his activity (which will no longer be capitalist labor).

10

In view of the dominating influence of American mass production, the fate of humanity in the coming years depends primarily upon the further development in America. The purely practical nature of the task to be accomplished immediately raises the question of political organization, i.e. the political differentiation which has, throughout the world with the exception of some colonial countries, passed through a retrograde movement towards the complete disappearance of basic differences and which in America has not gone beyond a rudimentary beginning. Among the important countries, America owes its exceptional political position to the circumstance that it had enormous spaces to conquer, that it could develop continuously in breadth and was never strongly compelled to explore itself in depth to any great extent and so sharply to work out its political contradictions. Whereas in the realm of Stalinism, it is

the general poverty which has permitted it to kill any political differentiation (and, in fact, to continue to kill it for at least as long as external impulses fail to influence the development of Russia in an opposite direction) in America, by contrast, it is the general wealth and the perspective of world domination which binds the total consciousness and has so far frustrated any considerable differentiation.

11

The so-called masses or broad layers of people alter their behavior in relation to existing conditions only when incisive material changes occur and the utmost pressure demands their adaptation to the new situation.

The movement of the masses is elementary and centers exclusively round the next possible step. Because of their social situation, the theories and ideologies of the political parties play a part for them only insofar as these refer to the next step possible; the rest can be replaced indifferently by any words or can be completely discarded without arousing the slightest shift in their behavior. When circumstances permit they press forward with infallible instinct for their immediate needs and, in this, invariably outstrip even their most capable and most willing leaders whereas, where there is no way out, they retreat and seek to mitigate the effect of the altered conditions by means of passive or active adaptation. Of course, it is to be noted that there are neither "homogeneous" masses nor classes. Each stratum pursues its special needs and there can be produced, on the average, more than an average effect, only then if

extraordinary circumstances put on the order of the day a decision for the whole nation, the great majority of a nation or even (in the ideal case) several nations and all interests are concentrated upon one point.

A democratic movement must know all this and base itself firmly upon it. It must learn without cease from the mass strivings if it does not wish to be diverted into sterile idealization, ideologizing and moralizing. To attain full clarity about its practical activity it must know equally that there would be little hope of a change in the behavior of the American masses if the perspective of world domination were more than ephemeral and if, with the aggravation of world difficulties, the beginning of the decline in the dominating country was not also indicated.

12

In capitalist society all institutions have the tendency to render themselves autonomous, i.e. to alienate themselves from their original aim and to become an end in themselves in the hands of those administering them. This is as true of the innumerable State and semi-State institutions as of all parties and organizations, under no circumstances excluding those which Labor has itself created for reasons political (parties), economic (trade unions), cultural (freethinking, educational, sports associations, etc.), or for reasons of mutual assistance (welfare organizations, insurance, etc.). No matter what the erstwhile intentions may have been, with each new institution, society in its totality has, in the long run, imposed on itself a new burden which is more or less willingly and unwillingly borne, which has only the

slightest connection with the original aim, and which in the majority of all cases consists of pure parasitism.

This tendency to become an end in itself, not only dominates the bureaucracies living on the various institutions and organizations but also the individual professional groups. It grows out of the division of labor (restriction to a definite field of activity which one cannot leave, as a rule, without losing one's livelihood) and the general competition which compels man to sell his capacities (reduced by the external relations), his product and even his convictions, his dignity, his honor and his sexuality on an ever-fluctuating market, which, only after successful haggling, enables him to acquire a greater or a lesser share of values, whether created by himself or by others, by means of money (robbery, theft, cheating, collections, begging and the like are "forms of appropriation" resulting from the intermediation through money).

Innumerable victims fall annually to this purely animal competitive struggle — millions and millions must periodically be ruined absolutely unnecessarily because, under a barbaric system, they must waste energy, happiness and health on the production of things which, whether useful, valueless or harmful, suddenly become "unsaleable," over which they have no power of disposal and out of the possession of which they are swindled partly by the mechanism of the system (in this connection especially wars, trade crises, stock exchange crashes, inflation and the whole currency complex), and partly by the innumerable parasites.

Along with the passive are to be found active victims — the subjectively honorable or dishonorable employers,

business men, managers, bankers, politicians, generals; finally, the adventurers, stock exchange jobbers, gangsters, etc., who mutually maltreat, harass, denounce, ruin, shoot each other or who — when the times change morals — are solemnly hanged at Nuremberg and Tokyo according to all the rules of modern judicial murder. Of course it makes a tremendous difference whether one is an active or a passive victim, but all are prisoners of the system; for none does rational “security” exist. It is, however, a tenfold misfortune for the working masses that in the course of selling and buying back their labor power (the buying back occurs through the acquisition of means of subsistence which as a general rule restores ever less than the average expended labor power) those middlemen who are known under the collective name of “Labor bureaucrats” have to be added to all their other burdens.

This bureaucracy is not merely an additional vampire (that is by no means the worst!) but it also ruins the elementary mass movements, poisons the consciousness of many individuals and bolsters up the system at a point where, on account of its brutality and senselessness, it would be most highly vulnerable. The following assertion is no literary exaggeration: The modern misery is the work of the Labor bureaucracy. If parties and “Labor parties” today still have millions of voters and the trade unions millions of members, it is not a reflection of any special “confidence” in them except for family-and-friend circles of the bureaucracy which participate in the parasitism. Their alleged influence is actually only the expression of the compulsory situation (manifested as direct State compulsion in the Stalinized world) in which the masses also find themselves because they *must* entrust themselves in the last resort to one of

the existing institutions as a result of tradition, habit, milieu or chance criteria. The fluctuations in the organizations and at elections demonstrate that the masses follow the political booms and “experiment” with the parties. In spite of this, a changing percentage always remains outside the organizational and election machinery, and long bitter experience has confirmed the old popular belief that *all* parties are no good!

13

The problem of political organization accordingly focuses itself on the question of the nature of a party which will be capable of performing its task and which will provide guarantees against the degeneration which has always occurred. The answer is simple enough and follows from the preceding investigations which permit no possibility for misunderstandings and self-deception regarding masses, individuals and institutions or their mutual interrelations. Once it has been granted that in capitalist society everything without exception becomes a commodity on the one hand and that, on the other, the most heroic idealism of single individuals as well as organizations conceived out of the purest motives cannot protect itself against being transformed into an end in itself (fetish) composed of many ramifications, it follows that it is primarily this process of becoming autonomous which must be absolutely prevented by the layout of the organization. In practice, therefore, the demand arises that political organization in the traditional sense be destroyed thereby making possible a movement directed at the effective alteration of the existing relationships.

For the purpose of theoretical clarification, the following is to be added:

The modern emancipation movements relied on theories and on the material interests of the oppressed, mainly the proletarians. They fell of necessity into the most disgusting degeneration, because although theories and material interests in themselves are, of course, indispensable and cannot under any circumstances be excluded, they represent only half of the necessary preconditions and in everyday practice afford no guarantee against abuse, falsification, corruption, violation and fetishization. In contradistinction to this, the democratic movement tries to find its guarantee, which historical experience has proved to be indispensable, by directly revolutionizing from the outset all forms of organization and activity, in their very *forms*. The attack on commodity relationships in bourgeois society is directed first of all against the institution which should provide the formal means for transformation, i.e. against its own party. These formal means can be adequately characterized in the following way: The party must incorporate and anticipate the organization of the future society in all essentials, that is, it must manifest the outlines in skeletal form. By which is meant that first, it must immediately begin within itself practically to dissolve bourgeois relations; and secondly, that it must, as the party, *be* the direct (organic) dissolution of these relations. Of course, in so far as it fights politically and organizes the political struggle that completely belongs to the bourgeois sphere, it is in that respect still a bourgeois party; *and* it is, at the same time, not a bourgeois party (or a party at all) in so far as in the very act of constituting itself it departs from the bourgeois framework, excludes by its structure any

possibility of thingification (i.e. of becoming an end in itself) and continuously cancels itself out as a party.

14

The formula of the party is directly its practice. The guarantees it provides are *material* guarantees which are inherent in and inseparable from its existence. Its foundation is the recognition that institutions are not to be protected by the people but the people are to be protected from their ruin by the institutions. For what men may think of themselves concerning the question of guarantees is of even less import than concerning other realms. For the party only the uncomfortable thesis is valid that man is what he eats and what conditions make of him. His nature is the nature of his environment — should he want to change it he must begin by changing the conditions on which he depends. However, it is not for ideological nor philosophical reasons but because of the inescapable need for guarantees that the democratic movement decides to eliminate all illusions about men.

The democratic movement states that from the outset particularistic interests are no longer to be pursued and demonstrates it not by idle phrases and solemn vows but by the elimination of any possibility of exercising material domination over individuals or the general public. Power and domination derive from the possession of money, the ownership of means of production, the institutions and their bureaucracies. There must no longer be any of this in the party: It must not invest any money in property, mortgages, and undertakings; it must own no offices, houses, presses, in

short, no apparatus whatever and no appointed bureaucracy. Its guarantee against becoming a thing in itself thus resides like a form of circular reasoning in its own presupposition: Incapable of incorporating material interests within its framework and of dominating materially, it is also incapable of representing class interests or political sectional interests. Whilst within it material advantages and social security for a bureaucracy are unattainable, the special party interest only exists in the sense of practically overcoming it for there is an immediate transition to the general task of social liberation without domination by a new class. Only on the basis of achieved freedom is the true special interest of the individual reestablished which in capitalist society has no possibility of developing itself and becomes reduced to the caricaturish types of profit-hungry, profit-producing and profit-parasitic beasts.

15

The concept of the party is, of course, merely the beginning, but the beginning immediately has in itself some peculiar consequences.

First of all, with the disappearance of the appointed bureaucracy, the material distinction between “leaders” and members within the party relationships also disappears. With it vanishes the need for an otherwise “indispensable” party — or organization statute, and the quarrels arising from it. The party declares: Statutes are exclusively for the protection of the bureaucracy; they provide the “juristic” framework for holding the bureaucracy together and are the weapon with which, in

the spirit of bourgeois law, they defend their position, their privileges and their interests *against* the members.

Furthermore, with the abolition of the bureaucracy, the party conception combats the restrictions and disastrous effects of competition and the division of labor. To the extent that division of labor exists in literary, propagandistic and organizational activity, it is not dictated by the necessity of earning money and does not express itself as a professional fixity. Competition, and the division of labor without a view to profit and professional existence lose their capitalist form and are transformed into true human self-affirmation; free competition as voluntary division of labor (in contrast to those compelled by blind natural forces) in which the individual achievement no longer contradicts the interests of society and true social equality is established, because all places and manners of activity are interchangeable in principle. Within the voluntary division of labor talent calls talent to the plan, whereas the professional bureaucrat, driven by necessity, seeks to hold down any newcomer who might be able to make his position “disputable” (from which again results the preparedness of the bureaucrat to falsify all his articles of belief rather than to make room for “revolutionary” ideas which do not correspond with his position). With the removal of the bureaucratic caste the class-forming effect of the division of labor with all its consequences accordingly disappears automatically for the party, by which means the party *is*, on the one hand, the concrete dissolution of bourgeois relations, and, on the other hand, initiates this dissolution in its relation to the environment.

Finally, after dispensing with statutes and the formation of castes, the external organizational compulsion in the shape of “discipline” ordered “from above” disappears as well as the “prescribed party opinion” which can be interpreted *ad lib* by the bureaucracy, and which repulsively manifests itself in the “official” tone, the intellectual superficiality, the political dilettantism and the “party style” in its literature. In this way, the democratic movement achieves a relation to all things which is determined purely by content: in accordance with its peculiar layout it already combats formalism and schematism and insists on the equal rights of all available means of expression. Free formation of opinion replaces the “internal” discussions (all differences are brought outside and publicly clarified) and replaces also the voting bound up with fractions, the bureaucratic wangling, maneuvering, frauds and “disciplinary proceedings.” The sole compulsion derives from the conscience of the individual who is prepared to stand up for his views and actions and to accept correction but who no longer knows the ridiculous fear of loss of prestige associated with concern for the maintenance of his “position.”

16

In this way, the party has done away with all barriers between it and the environment and has shaped with complete transparency for every man, both its relation to society and its internal mechanism. Such a transparency, real, factual, immediately entering into consciousness, of all relations is only possible where commodity economy has ceased to exist with equal reality, factualness,

immediacy. This aim is already achieved in the party, and, as soon as the end of commodity economy with its social effects is postulated and practically posed for it, other consequences come to light. This has become theoretically and practically possible alone through material, intellectual and scientific mass production *on the present level of development*, which, with equal indispensability, includes the most abundant experience in connection with that production on the one hand, and with State systems, movements, political parties, attempts at reform, etc., on the other. The party now demonstrates tangibly that the most extreme complication of the social question, as it is reflected in the party problem, tends indeed towards the change into its opposite, i.e. it suggests a quite simple solution. Its demonstration consists in the establishment of a system which, in its very functioning, precludes substantial aberrations, rendering impotent from within the party activity tending towards becoming a thing in itself, and for this purpose reducing it to a purely administrative task. The reduction of the universally enslaving commodity economy to an administrative task (unrestricted production capable of expansion and its distribution in accordance with the amount of labor time rendered, until a point is reached where the *absolute* surplus of wealth also makes counting of hours superfluous and liberates creative forces as yet unimagined) is the strategic goal of humanity — the party accordingly enters everywhere into the generally desired dissolution of the existing conditions and serves as a living model for the transformation of the whole of society.

The only thing at all in the party which still has any “commodity” tinge about it is connected with its literary

activity, but the tinge is merely the extraneous connection with capitalist conditions and has the same significance for the party as for any working person who, a party man in his private life, brings his labor power as before to the market and, nevertheless, does not receive the slightest *profit*. On the literary side the dissolution of the commodity contradiction is (as spiritual production, which must find its printed expression, which must be “sold” as printed material and which must be renewed) provisionally *one-sided* and therefore assumes a special form. This must be understood in the following way:

A political movement which desires to alter conditions that have become unbearable cannot take a single practical step without revolutionizing the ruling conceptions that have also become unbearable, without, that is, disclosing the dependence of the intellectual on the material misery. To accomplish its task it needs a general and special literature serving propaganda and agitation. The means required for this will be supplied by members, friends, sympathizers, but must be so arranged and used that the literature created *on the part of the movement* does not lead to a new commerce in commodities but maintains the strict character of pure utility (in this case for the satisfaction of intellectual, political, social needs). The utility character of literature is preserved within the movement when it is no longer produced for profit nor expounds any professional or commercial interests. In other words, the literary contributions must be, firstly, plain “contributions” in the literary sense of the word and should “yield” neither fees nor royalties nor anything else for the authors; secondly, in the sale of literature, the already mentioned offices, employees, canvassing on a percentage basis, etc., must disappear; thirdly, any surplus from the sale of literature

must be returned to production and serve its expansion (in the ideal case, possible surpluses make contributions and donations quite redundant from a certain point on).

It is this limitation of commodity economy in the party which transforms its material affairs (and in perspective that of the “State” which will no longer be a State as the instrument for the domination and the protection of the profit interests) into a transparent task of administration or of distribution that every normal individual after successful attendance at elementary school will be able to master easily. It is the liberation of humanity and the party from the party (from the State in miniature which, like the full-scale prototype, has a penetrating stench of business) and the most significant consequence of this liberation is the direct connection and even the coalescence of the party with the masses.

17

Coalescence or identification of the party with the masses has as its precondition an organic reciprocity between the two. In this connection, the highest valid principle is the recognition, which has become increasingly widespread since the time of Adam Smith, that the differences in natural talents between individuals are in reality much less than we believe. About such differences, Adam Smith says that they “are not so much the *cause* as the effect of the division of labor.” To which Marx added concretely that “In principle there is less difference between a navvy and a philosopher than between a watchdog and a greyhound.” If this recognition is implemented, then the first step towards

the dissolution of the masses, towards their individualization, has been taken; it *will be* implemented, however, and *is* identification with the masses, when the party directs its entire activity to the overcoming of the conditions of mass existence (*historically generated* and now *become historically superfluous*). The party enjoys a right to existence only as a tool which, like production capable of unlimited development and applicability, is nevertheless susceptible to being handled by the masses themselves. No matter what the external political conditions may be; whether those of illegality (as in Stalinist Europe and Asia, and some colonies); of semilegality (e.g. Western Germany, where one needs a “license,” which is really an officially supplied and “voluntarily” worn muzzle); or of legality — the organizational life of the party is marked always by simplicity and clarity, always thousands of unprepared people can enter and direct it, always it remains transparent to and controllable by all.

Once again, this is achieved by the concept of the party which knows that under capitalist conditions the masses are excluded from theoretical understanding and that therefore it can only be grasped by them or penetrate their consciousness as a *practical* movement. Since in the conditions described here nobody has any longer the opportunity to attain to a higher social prestige by means of the party than that which he enjoys independently of it; since the party no longer elevates itself materially above the conditions of mass existence and introduces a division of labor *voluntary* throughout, it coalesces with the people and arouses their deepest need: The need for individualization and quality production (suppressed in the midst of capitalist barbarism); the expansion of this quality production will end the mass life with its

barracks, living hells, labor slavery and the eternal cycle (war, crisis, hunger, epidemics, bad bread, potatoes, ersatz, stultifying newspapers, etc.).

Taking for its point of departure the all-sided suppressed need for individualization, the democratic movement decisively refuses to repeat the shortcomings of all political organizations and to descend in its literary activity to the level of alleged “popularity,” something the masses from the cradle to the grave have had more than enough of, because it is the level of their conditions of existence maintained by force. Here a parallel has become evident. The more material mass production increases under capitalism, the greater the misery of humanity — the more the “Workers’ Parties” have devoted themselves to intellectual mass production, the less have they been able to satisfy any needs and the more intensively have they contributed to the general decline and servitude of the masses. The liberation of mankind can only be accomplished when as many individuals as possible have at their disposal sufficient knowledge and fight with its help against literary, scientific, artistic and political deception, against stupidity and sham knowledge in every form. Love of truth based on ignorance manifests itself in the political sphere as demagoguery and idiocy; proved knowledge enables the movement to understand the impulses of the masses, to lend them striking political expression and to illustrate that the problem of liberation from capitalist insanity is for the masses no theoretical but a practical problem. Only from practical progress do increasing numbers of individuals find access also to the theory which is absolutely necessary for the movement: they emerge, that is, from the masses and become conscious conquerors of bourgeois conditions, which in the same

measure rest upon the material *and* spiritual servitude of the masses.

18

Ideas do not drop from the sky. Intimate acquaintance with philosophy and scientific discipline; lengthy, extensive experiences, investigations and reflection in the manifold fields; repeated starts, deviations and experiments; to which must be added the change in the total world situation brought about by the *absolute* economic preponderance of America, which arose during the second world war — all this was required in order to arrive at the following results: That (*a*) the idea of a movement could be conceived, the essence of which is only to be sought in its relation to the environment and which has an independent existence through nothing else but the constant renunciation of this existence, in its connection with its contrary (the masses individualizing themselves). That (*b*) the movement should base itself politically upon an economic plan which contrary to all previous endeavors takes world economy and the immediate possibility of the increase of wealth as its point of departure, which rejects the *rule* of the proletariat as an absurd contradiction, and for the first time wants to overcome bourgeois society only with such means as the latter has itself organically produced.

The simplicity of the formula for the party and the plan is the outcome of a development appearing to be almost hopelessly complicated. Being is becoming and becoming is being. The greater passes through the smaller; freedom grows out of servitude carried to its

end. It is the same with the democratic movement as with all other things — it *is*, while it *becomes*; it *becomes*, while it *is*. But as a party it has so specifically constituted itself that it only represents “incomplete” Being and can at no time deprive itself of the highest wisdom which has ever been expressed. The educator must himself be educated.

JOSEF WEBER

1950